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Chin: 'Nothing to Regret'

Spy Calls Imprisonment 'Small Price' for Boosting Sino-U.S. Ties

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Larry Wu-Tai Chin, the former CIA analyst convicted last week of spying for China for 30 years, described himself yesterday as "a patriotic American" who had no regrets about handing over classified information because he believed that he had helped "bring about the conversion of China from an enemy to a sworn ally."

"When I think I have accomplished these efforts to improve the livelihood of 1 billion Chinese people, my being in prison, even for life, is a very small price to pay," said Chin during a half-hour news conference at the Prince William County Detention Center, where he is awaiting sentencing on March 17.

"It's worth it, I have nothing to regret," he said, although he admitted that "I had no right" to pass classified information.

Chin, wearing a navy blue jail jump suit, appeared relaxed, and he occasionally laughed with reporters. He had requested the interview, and he was eager to elaborate on his reasons for spying, which he related to a federal jury in Alexandria at his trial last week.

Chin, a Chinese translator with the CIA's Foreign Broadcast Information Service until his retirement in 1981, told the court that he had given the Chinese secret information as part of a personal "mission" to lessen hostility between the two countries.

He said he passed only information indicating U.S. intentions to normalize relations with China and its hopes for friendship with Peking in an effort to calm Chinese suspi-

cions and paranoia about the United States.

He said the \$180,000 that prosecutors said he received from the Chinese was "only a byproduct" of this private "mission."

Yesterday, Chin met reporters with a list of 20 points written in Chinese that he hoped to make during the interview. Asked if he ever considered himself a spy, he replied: "If you have to give that name, then, I guess that's it." But he added that "I think I'm a patriotic American trying to convert a sworn enemy into a trusted ally."

When a reporter asked him if he were "proud of stealing documents," Chin said that the remark "hurt me to the quick."

"I was not proud of the stealing portion, but I was proud of the results The means [may] be terrible but the end is good."

Drawing on his Chinese heritage, as he did several times during the interview, Chin related a legend about a Chinese statesman, Sima Guang, who smashed a jar full of water to save a child who was drowning in the liquid.

"By the same token, I broke the law of the United States," Chin said, "like breaking that jar, but I drained away the water of hostility and saved the child of U.S. and China friendship and cooperation and reconciliation."

"I would have to think it over," Chin, 63 and a naturalized American since 1952, responded when asked if he would accept an offer, if it were given, for political asylum in China. "I have very good feelings about the United States. This is my country. I want to stay here."

He faces a maximum of two life sentences and 83 additional years in

prison as well as more than \$3 million in fines as a result of his conviction on espionage, conspiracy, income tax and financial reporting laws.

Testimony at the trial and interviews with relatives portray Chin as a very intelligent man, driven by inordinate attention to detail, who displayed sophistication and naivete in equal measure. He also loved to travel and play blackjack in Las Vegas.

"He's a very complex man," said one family member who did not want to be identified. He said Chin always spoke his mind but disliked confrontation, and though he was worldly in many ways, "he was also gullible at times."

He is considered a patriarch of an extended family of about 40 members, many of whom he had helped emigrate to the United States.

The same qualities that brought Chin acclaim from his CIA supervisors as "one of the best" Chinese translators at the broadcast service, caused him to keep meticulous diaries that prosecutors effectively used at his trial to document his meetings with Chinese agents. Chin's entries included such details as the dishes he ate in Peking with three senior officials of the intelligence service: "Bears' feet" and "muttonpot."

Perhaps the most damaging part of the government's evidence against Chin came from statements he made to FBI agents the night of his arrest, when he described his spying activities.

Asked yesterday why he had spoken to them, Chin said he had been "intimidated" by three armed men but also "sort of relieved to have a chance to tell my story Consciously or unconsciously, I wanted people to know what I did was for the good of U.S.-China relations."